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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 000836

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KTIP](#) [KWMN](#) [KCRM](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [SMIG](#) [AM](#)
SUBJECT: TIP RATING CATCHES KOCHARIAN'S ATTENTION

REF: SECSTATE 99407

Classified By: Amb. John M. Evans for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

SUMMARY

11. (C) Armenia's second consecutive ranking on the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Tier 2 Watchlist seems to have touched a nerve in the highest levels of Armenian government. During a June 20 meeting with the Ambassador, Deputy Foreign Minister Arman Kirakossian confirmed news reports that President Kocharian had summoned senior law enforcement officials to discuss trafficking issues in recent days. The Ambassador delivered the USG's TIP Action Plan for Armenia to Kirakossian, who offered little defense of the GOAM's efforts to combat trafficking. The deputy minister's lack of complaint behind closed doors illustrates a larger phenomenon whereby the government has criticized the TIP Report's methodology in public, but indicated in private that it takes the rating seriously. In the days following the June 6 TIP Report release, the pro-government press, the procuracy and the police department publicly dismissed it as inaccurate. However, Anti-TIP Unit Senior Prosecutor Armen Boshnaghyan told us privately that one of the problems identified in the report -- the fact that the government conducted only a cursory investigation into allegations of corruption by an employee of the procuracy -- was accurate. End Summary.

KOCHARIAN CALLS IN THE BIG GUNS

12. (C) Armenia's second consecutive ranking on the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Tier 2 Watchlist appears to have spurred President Kocharian to action on the issue. During a June 20 meeting with the Ambassador, Kirakossian confirmed news reports that the president had summoned senior law enforcement officials to discuss trafficking issues in recent days. Kirakossian said the meeting had taken place, and that the justice minister, head of the National Security Service, head of the state police and the prosecutor general were all present (though no MFA representatives attended).

PRIVATELY, ARMENIA ADMITS IT COULD DO MORE

13. (C) Kocharian's action tracks with our observation that, despite public bluster from law enforcement officials, the GOAM appears to acknowledge privately that Armenia could do more to fight trafficking. Ambassador Evans presented our TIP Action Plan and demarche points to Kirakossian and Valery Mkrtumyan, the head of Armenia's interagency Anti-TIP

Commission, June 20. Mkrtumyan said the government would take our recommendations under consideration while formulating the GOAM's new National Action Plan. He also said the government plans to raise the level of participation in the Anti-TIP Commission to the deputy ministerial level so that the commission could function as a decision-making body, rather than as a consultative group.

¶4. (C) After Ambassador Evans presented reftel points to Kirakossian, the deputy foreign minister ventured that the GOAM had in fact investigated allegations of complicity with trafficking involving procuracy employee Aristakes Yeremyan. Ambassador Evans said the USG was aware of the investigation, which took less than two weeks, but said frankly that the investigation appeared to be cursory and superficial. Kirakossian had no rebuttal.

¶5. (C) Illustrating again the disparity between the GOAM's public statements on TIP and its private statements, Anti-TIP Unit Senior Prosecutor Boshnaghyan stated in an interview with RFE/RL that Armenian law-enforcement authorities are doing all they can to combat trafficking. In a private conversation with us, however, Boshnaghyan (please protect) raised questions about the quality of the investigation into allegations against Yeremyan, and said that the members of the interagency investigatory committee from outside the procuracy played no role in the investigation. Boshnaghyan also said that Yeremyan had an excellent relationship with and the full support of Prosecutor General Aghvan Hovsepyan.

PUBLICLY, GOAM SEEMS UNCONCERNED ABOUT WATCHLIST STATUS

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¶6. (C) In public, pro-government media and law enforcement officials have dismissed the TIP Report as inaccurate. Reports by pro-government newspapers in the days following the June 6 release of the 2006 TIP Report were largely critical of the report's methodology. The Hayots Ashkhar newspaper reported June 8 that NGOs are one source of information for the TIP Report, and questioned the credibility of NGO sources, saying this would not be the first time that NGOs have exaggerated facts. The same day, Hayots Ashkhar quoted the procuracy spokesman as saying that the report was inaccurate and that its sources were unreliable.

¶7. (C) Law enforcement officials also publicly questioned the validity of the TIP Report's allegations. Almost all Armenian newspapers covered a June 15 press conference held by the deputy head of the police department, Karen Babakekhian, during which he presented statistics of criminal cases related to trafficking and pimping. Haykakan Zhamanak, a gossip-prone tabloid, reported that Babakekhian's press conference was intended to refute the TIP Report. Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian said during a June 8 press conference that Armenian authorities were taking serious steps to solve the trafficking problem. He noted that instances of trafficking appear to have increased despite those serious steps, and did not offer a reason. (Note: Though not presented in an explicitly defensive posture, Oskanian's comments appeared to be intended to demonstrate that Armenia was doing everything in its power to combat trafficking. End Note.)

COMMENT

¶8. (C) The GOAM's continued practice of publicly questioning the accuracy of the TIP Report is disappointing, but not surprising. More surprising, but perhaps encouraging, is that the report seems to have caught President Kocharian's attention, motivating him to call a high-level meeting to

discuss the issue. It is clear to us that Armenia does not want to be on the watchlist, especially considering Azerbaijan's rise to Tier 2 during the past year. It is too soon to tell whether this positive activity will actually result in substantive improvement, but things appear to be moving in the right direction.

EVANS